

9-1-1993

S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development: An Overview

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Recommended Citation

(CPAR), Center for Public Affairs Research, "S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development: An Overview" (1993).
Publications Archives, 1963-2000. 623.
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An Overview

What Is S.T.A.R.T.?

S.T.A.R.T. stands for Strategic Training And Resource Targeting—a self-help approach to local economic development. Today's rapidly changing economic climate requires new strategies and processes for managing local economic development. In fact, the successful communities of the future will be those that are able to rely on local initiative and resources to tailor their own economic development strategies. S.T.A.R.T. provides you with the necessary tools to determine your community's strengths and weaknesses, and helps you develop a strategic plan to improve your local economy.



Contents of the S.T.A.R.T. Kit

- Local Leader's Guide
- Participants' Handbooks
- Small Group Discussion Leaders Guide
- Community Analysis Software
- Day 1 and Day 2 Videotapes
- Community and Business Attitude Surveys
- Promotional Packet
- Action Step Handbooks

What Can We Expect?

An action plan to guide economic development will be produced by you and your fellow community participants when you complete the S.T.A.R.T. process.

This plan will include:

- Major issues affecting economic development in your community.
- Strategies for working with these issues.
- Persons identified to carry out the action plan.
- Timelines for action step completion.

After creating an action plan, your community will hold a town hall meeting, to present the action plan to the community-at-large, to encourage people to sign up for task forces, and to provide a forum for discussions about the plans.

Who Is Involved In S.T.A.R.T?

S.T.A.R.T. relies on a local team of volunteers to take the community through the strategic planning process. The key people and their roles are as follows:

- Local leader will manage the local strategic planning project and will be viewed by the community as having a long term commitment to development. This person is responsible for coordinating and managing the activities of S.T.A.R.T. resource team members and is the contact person for working with the outside facilitator and CPAR staff. The local leader will need to spend 8 to 10 hours becoming familiar with the S.T.A.R.T. kit and several hours each week managing the resource team and keeping community members informed about local activities.
- Local resource team of 6 to 10 volunteers will fill the roles listed in the table below. Resource team members should have resources to provide logistical and other support for the local strategic planning effort. Members of the chamber of commerce, economic development group(s), school district, city and county government, hospital, and local businesses are examples. They will spend approximately three to four hours each week on their specific assignments.

- Local steering committee of 25-30 representatives from the community (including the local leader and resource team members) will attend a two-hour introductory meeting, two six-hour strategic planning sessions, one two-hour action planning session, and one three-hour session on the action plan. This larger committee will analyze external and internal trends, identify key issues, develop strategies for addressing those issues, and be the driving force behind the implementation of an action plan. The steering committee must broadly represent different sectors in the community: business, government, education, health care, and others.

Outside help will also be available. The following assistance is provided as part of the S.T.A.R.T. package:

- Technical Assistance: Call the Community Assistance Program at the Center for Public Affairs Research at 800/227-4533 for help as you work through the process.
- Expert Facilitator: A facilitator will lead participants through the introductory meeting, two strategic planning sessions and the action plan review session.

Tasks and Requirements of Resource Committee Members

Volunteer Assignment	Job Description	Skills, Abilities, and Resources
A. Recorder	Take minutes of all meetings of local resource team and steering committee Type minutes Type final action plan	Ability to listen carefully and record information Ability to type and/or word process
B. Meeting Planner	Arrange for meeting room Arrange for meals and breaks Arrange for video equipment	Ability to organize and coordinate details Ability to work with people
C. Surveyor	Photocopy surveys Recruit volunteers for door-to-door delivery or mass mailing of surveys	Ability to recruit and organize volunteers Access to a copy machine
D. Data Coordinator	Generate employment, labor force, and revenue tables Enter survey results and generate response percentages for each question	Ability to learn and use computer software Access to an IBM-compatible personal computer
E. Public Relations Liaison	Write news stories for local newspaper Draft letters/resolutions of support from chamber, city council, etc.	Ability to write news stories Ability to communicate
F. Steering Committee Liaison	Send meeting invitations to people identified by resource team Assemble Participants' Handbooks and packets and mail or distribute to steering committee members one week before each session	Access to a copy machine Ability to assemble Participants' Handbooks
G. Small Group Discussion Leaders	Facilitate discussion of small groups during planning sessions	Ability to understand and explain data Ability to facilitate discussion and keep groups on track Ability to give all persons a chance to speak

What Will Be Done?

S.T.A.R.T. has seven steps which can usually be completed within a five-month time frame.

Step One: Organize.

To begin, the local leader will organize several meetings of the resource team, the core working committee. Team members should be people who are ready to work to bring about change and they must make a time (and often financial) commitment to the preparations for the strategic planning sessions. During this phase, resource team members will secure resources for mailing and processing the surveys, and will solicit endorsement of S.T.A.R.T. by key local public and private organizations. At this time, the resource team will begin using the community analysis software to produce and collect information on the community. To learn about the behavior and perceptions of community members, one or more members of the local resource team will coordinate the community and business attitude surveys. The surveys, coupled with S.T.A.R.T. data, will help you understand your community's strengths and weaknesses.

Step Two: Analyze External and Internal Factors.

During the two strategic planning sessions (Day 1 and Day 2) you will use the economic data and community and business survey results generated in step one to identify threats and opportunities in the environment. The data will help you identify national, statewide and local economic trends and relate them to local strengths and weaknesses.

Step Three: Identify Key Issues.

During the Day 1 and Day 2 sessions, participants will discuss and identify the key issues that are affecting the community and make decisions about how to manage them for the community's benefit, now and in the future. Steering committee members will answer four questions:

- What key factors are affecting the community right now?
- How are these factors affecting the community?
- Based on these factors, what appear to be the issues that will have the greatest impact on the community in the next five years?
- Why will these issues affect the community?

Step Four: Develop Strategies.

Once key issues have been identified and the steering committee understands how and why these issues affect the community, the next step is to prioritize them. Next, strate-

gies for working with the issues will be identified. At this point the steering committee will have gained a sense of who the community is, where it is now, where it wants to be, and how to get there. Once this is agreed upon, the group can move to step five in the strategic planning process.

Step Five: Develop an Action Plan.

This step is the core of strategic planning; moving the community from thinking and planning to doing. The steering committee translates its most important strategies into specific action steps. The action plan is developed by steering committee members working in task forces during a four-week period after the Day 2 meeting. During this period, task force members meet on their own as well as with other S.T.A.R.T. resource persons.

The action plan will:

- State an overall goal.
- Specify actions within each strategy.
- Name persons responsible for accomplishing actions.
- Identify how those actions or activities will be accomplished.
- Name resources needed.
- Specify timelines for implementation.

The entire steering committee will meet again for about three hours on Day 3 to review, refine and accept the community's action plan. Resource people are invited to attend this session to add their expertise to the action plan areas. Next, the community is ready to begin taking charge of its own economic well-being.

After your community's action plan is developed, you will be ready for your town hall meeting.

Step Six: Implement the Action Plan.

In the implementation phase, the people who have accepted responsibility for reaching the identified goals go to work. This phase will take months—for some projects, maybe even a few years—to complete. This is the step in which the community's economic well-being begins to improve.

Step Seven: Monitor.

The local leader will monitor the progress of the action committees, inspire them, and encourage them to keep on schedule. He or she will also assist in adjusting the action plan to changes in the community's environment. All of the work that went into your community's strategic planning process will have been wasted unless this step occurs: your plans are only as good as their results. Like the implementation step, monitoring is continuous.

Where Do We Begin?

S.T.A.R.T. depends on a community's self-assessment of its readiness to proceed with strategic planning for economic development. Only the community itself can judge its desire, resources, and readiness to undertake a comprehensive process such as S.T.A.R.T. To facilitate your decision process, UNO has developed a readiness assessment process that requires two meetings of community leaders. Usually a few people come together to discuss S.T.A.R.T. and community readiness for it, and a subsequent meeting(s) broadens the audience to other leaders and community members. The following are some essential criteria to consider when assessing your community's readiness.

- Toleration of change
- Management of internal conflict
- Ability to work together
- Committed local leadership and volunteers
- Existing organizations for ongoing efforts
- Time and money
- Willingness to take risks

What Does It Cost?

In addition to the \$1,000 price of the self-help package, communities should plan for the following expenses.

Incidental Expenses	Estimated Costs
Planning Sessions	
Room rental	\$25-50/day
Coffee, donuts	\$1.00/person
Lunch	\$2-4/person
Video equipment	\$5-10/day
Surveys	
Copying	\$0.05/copy x 6 pages per questionnaire
Envelopes	\$0.03 each
Postage	\$0.20 each (bulk rate)

Are We Ready for S.T.A.R.T.?

Several steps are necessary for a community to decide whether it is ready for S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development:

- Read the *Overview* and Steps to S.T.A.R.T. and view the Strategic Planning videotape.
- Discuss issues raised in the tape and by the group.
- Be willing to accept and handle conflicts that may arise.
- Choose and support a local leader to spearhead the project.
- Assess the availability of 25 to 30 persons to serve on the resource team and steering committee.
- Identify a local organization(s) to sponsor S.T.A.R.T.
- Identify financial supporters for S.T.A.R.T. and the resulting activities.
- Meet with S.T.A.R.T. program staff.

To receive your copy of our readiness assessment packet "Introducing S.T.A.R.T.," or for more information, write or call the Center for Public Affairs Research, Peter Kiewit Conference Center, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182; phone: 402/595-2311 or 800/227-4533.

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Gaining and Maintaining Momentum

Excitement and dedication are the two keys to successful volunteer projects. How does a community sustain the enthusiasm needed to complete action steps? The following

factors help a community gather the support to begin and the drive to keep long-term efforts alive.

Wide variety of ages/talents on task forces
Enthusiastic leaders
Early successes
Positive publicity
Celebrations

Motivational speakers
Believing in yourselves
Talking to other S.T.A.R.T. communities
Having fun

S.T.A.R.T. is a service of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research, and is provided in cooperation with the Omaha World-Herald and the Nebraska Municipal Power Pool. September, 1993

